



Frequently Asked Questions: COVID-19 Vaccine

Updated **March 9, 2021**: Information is still evolving rapidly and BPHC will update this information as new and relevant information becomes available and identify new and updated questions in **red**.

VACCINE AVAILABILITY

1. How many vaccines and what types are in development?

Dozens of vaccines are now in development, and several are moving toward final development. Vaccines from two vaccine makers, Pfizer and Moderna, were approved in December 2020. The Johnson and Johnson's vaccine was approved in February 2021.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/index.html>.

2. When can I get the vaccine?

Vaccines have been available in Massachusetts since December 2020. The State of Massachusetts COVID-19 Advisory Group agreed that first doses would go to those at highest risk for contracting COVID-19 and also prioritized those at high risk of poor outcomes if they get COVID-19. The State has a COVID-19 vaccination distribution timeline. To find out when you may be eligible to get vaccinated go to <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/massachusetts-covid-19-vaccination-phases>.

3. Will residents be required to get the vaccine?

We don't know of any current plans to make COVID-19 vaccines mandatory, and the Biden administration has said that it does not plan to make the vaccine mandatory throughout the U.S.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/faq.html>.

4. Once the COVID-19 vaccine is available, where can I go to get it?

Appointments can be scheduled by visiting <https://vaxfinder.mass.gov/>. To find vaccine sites in Boston, go to <https://www.boston.gov/departments/public-health-commission/covid-19-vaccine-boston>.

5. Will I have to pay for the vaccine?

The vaccine is being provided free of charge to all individuals by the federal government. If you have insurance, it will be billed at no cost to you. However, you do not need to be insured to receive the vaccine. <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-vaccine-frequently-asked-questions>.

VACCINE EFFECTIVENESS

6. How do COVID-19 vaccines work?

The first available COVID-19 vaccines work by triggering the immune system to produce

antibodies. These antibodies protect us from getting infected if the real virus enters our bodies.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines.html>.

7. **Does the vaccine keep me from getting COVID-19?**

Clinical trial data has shown COVID-19 vaccines are very effective (up to 95 percent) in preventing COVID-19, particularly preventing the most severe cases of this virus. In addition to receiving the vaccine, it is also important to keep wearing a mask and social distancing because:

1. Not everyone will get the vaccine at once.
2. Although it is not likely, it is still possible to get COVID-19 after getting the vaccine, as no vaccine is 100 percent effective.
3. We're currently not sure yet how long the vaccine will protect you from COVID-19.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/vaccine-benefits.html>.

8. **Do I have to follow all prevention steps if I am fully vaccinated?**

People are considered to be fully vaccinated 2 weeks after receiving the second dose of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine, or 2 weeks after receiving the Johnson & Johnson's Janssen vaccine. Once fully vaccinated there are things you can do.

- You can gather indoors with fully vaccinated people without wearing a mask.
- You can gather indoors with unvaccinated people from one other household (for example, visiting with relatives who all live together) without masks, unless any of those people or anyone they live with has an increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19.
- If you've been around someone who has COVID-19, you do not need to stay away from others or get tested unless you have symptoms.

It is important to keep taking precautions in public places like wearing a face covering, staying 6 feet apart from others, and avoiding crowds and poorly ventilated spaces.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated.html>

9. **If I had COVID-19 already, do I need to get vaccinated?**

COVID-19 vaccination should be offered to those who have had COVID-19. You should not get the COVID-19 vaccine while you are having symptoms or if you are still in your isolation period.

<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/info-by-product/clinical-considerations.html>.

VACCINE SAFETY

10. **How do we know if the vaccine is safe?**

Vaccines go through more testing than any other pharmaceuticals. And the manufacturing is to ensure that every dose must consistently be of high quality.

Extensive testing in clinical trials is conducted to prove safety. During these trials, the vaccine is given to tens of thousands of people and tested for effectiveness and safety. The information from



these trials is reviewed by both the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) to approve the vaccine and makes recommendations for use.

Of the thousands of people who participated in the COVID-19 vaccine clinical trials, Moderna reported 20 percent participants were Hispanic/Latinx and 9.7 percent were Black.

(<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines/Moderna.html>). While

Pfizer reported 26.2 percent were Hispanic/Latinx and 9.8 percent were Black

(<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines/Pfizer-BioNTech.html>).

Clinical trials for the J&J/Janssen vaccine included 45.3% Hispanic/Latinx and 19.4% Black

(<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines/janssen.html>).

11. Can I get COVID-19 from the vaccine or spread COVID-19 from the vaccine?

No, you cannot get COVID-19 from the vaccine or spread COVID-19 from the vaccine. The vaccine doesn't actually contain the virus that causes COVID-19, which means the vaccine itself won't cause you to get or spread COVID-19. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/facts.html#:~:text=It%20typically%20takes%20a%20few,vaccination%20and%20still%20get%20sick.>

12. What are potential side effects of the vaccine?

Some people are reporting mild side effects, which are signs the immune system is working. Soreness and/or redness at the injection site is the most common reaction. Reported side effects also include:

- Headaches
- Fatigue
- Fever
- Chills
- Muscle pain
- Pain in joints

For some people, these side effects were worse after the second dose.

Side effects from a vaccine usually go away on their own within a few days. Over-the-counter medicine, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen manage most side effects after the vaccine.

However, it is recommended that you avoid taking these medications right before getting your vaccine. After receiving the vaccine, you will be instructed on how to manage these symptoms.

There have been no serious safety concerns, including deaths, noted in anyone who has received these vaccines. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/expect/after.html>.

13. Should I get the vaccine if I have allergies?

It's recommended that if you've had an allergic reaction to any of the ingredients in the vaccine, you should not get it. But overall, having allergies doesn't exclude you from getting the vaccine. If you have had an immediate allergic reaction - even if it was not severe - to a vaccine or injectable



therapy for another disease, ask your healthcare provider if you should get a COVID-19 vaccine. Everyone who gets the vaccine will be watched for 15 minutes after the injection to make sure they do not have any signs of an allergic reaction. People who have severe allergies to other vaccines or injectable medications will be watched for 30 minutes.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/faq.html>.

14. Can children and infants get the COVID vaccine?

The Pfizer vaccine is approved for ages 16 years and older, and the Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccine are approved for ages 18 years and older. Some of the manufacturers have begun clinical trials on kids ages 12 and older, but no vaccine for children under the age of 16 has been approved yet. It will still be a couple of months to get through those trials and then get approval to administer to children. <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/info-by-product/moderna/index.html>
<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/info-by-product/pfizer/index.html>

15. Is the COVID-19 vaccine safe for pregnant women and women who are breastfeeding? Does the vaccine affect fertility?

Studies are ongoing regarding the safety of COVID-19 vaccines in pregnant women and there is no data yet. We do know that it does not enter the cells of the developing baby. In addition, we know that pregnant women who develop COVID-19 have an increased risk of severe illness and may have an increased risk of poor pregnancy outcomes like pre-term labor. Pregnant women and women who are breastfeeding should discuss the risks and benefits of her healthcare provider to help them make an informed decision.

There is no evidence that the COVID-19 vaccine affects fertility. The vaccine is recommended even if you are planning to get pregnant soon. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/recommendations/pregnancy.html>.

16. Have there been complications found or warnings issued for those who've already taken the flu vaccine?

We are not aware that any warnings have been issued. But we are monitoring closely and will communicate further information that becomes available as necessary.

<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/misconceptions.htm>.

17. What do we really know about potential long-term effects?

Long-term effects are monitored for all vaccines, including the COVID-19 vaccines. The effects documented to date are short-term and typical of many vaccines.

<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/reporting/index.html>.



18. What about the new strain out of Europe? What do we know about it being in the US?

In the United Kingdom (UK), a new variant has emerged with an unusually large number of mutations. This variant seems to spread more easily and quickly than other variants. Currently, there is no evidence that it causes more severe illness or increased risk of death. This variant was first detected in September 2020 and it has since been detected in numerous countries around the world, including the United States and Canada.

CDC, in collaboration with other public health agencies, is monitoring the situation closely. CDC is working to detect and characterize emerging viral variants and expand its ability to look for COVID-19 and new variants. At this time, the same strategies to prevent the original COVID-19 strain will also prevent the new strain. This includes mask-wearing, social distancing, and frequent handwashing. Most experts believe that the COVID-19 vaccine will still be effective in preventing the new variant. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/transmission/variant.html>.

19. Will a booster dose be needed?

The need for and timing of booster doses for COVID-19 vaccines have not been established. No additional doses beyond the two-dose primary series are recommended at this time.

<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/info-by-product/clinical-considerations.html#Booster-doses>.

20. Will the mRNA vaccines stay in my body or enter my DNA?

COVID-19 mRNA vaccines do not change or interact with your DNA in any way. Messenger RNA vaccines - also called mRNA vaccines - teach our cells how to make a protein that triggers an immune response that make antibodies which protects us from getting infected if the real virus enters our bodies. The cell breaks down and gets rid of the mRNA soon after it is finished using the instructions. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/facts.html>.

21. My health condition isn't addressed here. How do I know if the vaccine is safe for me?

If you have concerns about taking the COVID-19 vaccine, talk to your healthcare provider.

22. I received the first dose of the Pfizer/Moderna vaccine, do I need to get the second dose?

Both the vaccines from Pfizer-BioNTech and from Moderna require two doses. You should get the second dose as close to the recommended 3-week or 1-month interval as possible. However, there is no maximum interval between the first and second doses for either vaccine. You should not get the second dose earlier than the recommended interval. (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/faq.html#doses>).

